

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 301 637

CE 050 587

AUTHOR Miyasaka, Kosaku
TITLE Historical Characteristics of Adult Education in Japan.
PUB DATE Jul 86
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on the History of Adult Education (Oxford, England, July 14-17, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Historical Materials (060)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Education; Developed Nations; *Educational Change; *Educational History; *Educational Responsibility; Educational Theories; Foreign Countries; *Role of Education
IDENTIFIERS *Japan

ABSTRACT

In its modern sense, adult education in Japan began after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Until 1945, adult education functioned as an agent to indoctrinate the nationalistic and military ideology. Since World War II, Japan has adopted the democratic social system and has become a capitalist society like the West. In Japan, social education is the term used in place of adult education. Social education is not equivalent to adult education, but it means adult and continuing education, youth service, community development, and recreational and physical activities. It does not usually include vocational and technical education and has not intended to build any human resources development into its activities. Social education is individualistic in terms of aim and purpose, nonpolitical and neutral in terms of social stance, and based on supply-and-demand principles in terms of provision. Adult education in Japan is engaged in serving consumers who want to look for private entertainment and happiness without consideration for economic, social, and international crises. Currently, the Japanese government is preparing for a new system of education, the so-called system of the "learning society." A new concept of adult education should be designed that contributes to the building of new personalities for a post-industrial society and that focuses on helping people to awaken through learning about the real world. (YLB)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
✓ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
DERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

K. Miyasaka

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED301637

Historical Characteristics of Adult Education in Japan

Kosaku Miyasaka, Faculty of Education, The University of Tokyo

I. Developmental Stages

Adult Education, in its modern sense, in Japan started her step after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, which was a rapid political change and the beginning of the capitalist society.

Roughly speaking, we can find two stages in the historical process of our adult education:

First: The Pre-war period (1868-1945)

For this period Japan was a peculiar nation where there was a mixed complex of modern and pre-modern, eastern and western. The master of Japan was, it was assumed, the Emperor, while the true rulers were bureaucrats, capitalists and landowners. They composed a power block named "The Emperor Ruling Regime". Adult education was obliged to serve the regime in propagating the ideology supported by the ruling class. The contents of teaching were sometimes scientific as far as they were related to production, but even in this case they were often not free from irrational and misty myth.

In short, adult education in the pre-war period functioned as an agent to indoctrinate the nationalistic and military ideology into the people. However, sometimes people's movement of learning for liberation occurred and provided some enlightened antagonists against the ruling class. As the Marxists and radical socialists were sentenced as illegal at that time, they could not have the opportunity to introduce their thoughts to the people. The govern-

CE050587

ment made use of extension classes and also even tutorial class type education in order to make workers' education more efficient, imitating the British case, though never introducing her liberal and democratic ethos.

Second: The Post-war Period (1945 -)

After the Second World War, Japan was forced to adopt the democratic social system and to make a pure capitalist society like the West. And then Japan has succeeded in making herself a strong economic power.

Has adult education contributed to the rapid economic growth? The answer is yes and no, according to the definition of adult education. In Japan they use the term "social education" in place of adult education. Strictly speaking, social education is not equivalent to adult education. It rather means adult and continuing education, youth service, community development and recreational and physical activities. Anyway, public social education is practised by local governments through the work of "kominkan" (public citizens' hall). Social education does not usually include vocational and technical education as well as adult education in Britain in its traditional sense. Therefore, social education has not intended any manpower built into its activities. We cannot recognize any merit for social education in the area of labour force building. On the other hand, when we recognize that social education has encouraged housewives, the main clientele, to become patient and skillful "shadow-workers" who work diligently in homes and let their husbands work hard and freely in companies. Working people cannot attend the social education classes because they have not time to do it due to overtime work and long travelling times. Most companies have comprehensive programs for employee education and practise them very effectively. Within-company-education is the most successful case of social education in

the non-public area.

In short, adult education in the post-war period is characterised as modern education that is parallel to adult education in Britain. Its characteristics are as follows: individualism in terms of aim and purpose - self realisation; non-political and neutral in terms of social stance; demand-and-supply principle in terms of provision - pseudo-democratic disguise.

Now we are facing the crucial problem that we should change the present system of adult education to the new one which may guarantee any people to liberate them and to overcome their alienation.

2. Problems of the Present Stage of Adult Education

Suggested above, adult education in Japan is engaged in servicing consumers who want to look for private entertainment and happiness without any consideration of the crisis in and outside their country. While nuclear pollution is spreading and threatening the survival of human beings, the consumers of adult education are absorbed in private performance for self-actualisation. They neglect the problems of the starving in the third world. They claim that they have the right to learn and to be provided with learning opportunities by the public authorities. For the governments in the welfare state, the consumers, the voters, are almighty beings whose demands shall be authorized as a sovereign right.

We should consider that education, particularly public education, should be rather a social matter than a private one. Once, at the starting point of British adult education, the 1919 report of the Reconstruction Committee set the two aims of adult education: public (social) and private (individual). One is to help the people build full citizenship and the other is to promote the individual's self-realization. In the early days of the WEA the main stream of the subjects was social science, such as political

economics, industrial history and politics, which were expected as a science that could guide the working people to the world of truths. As the welfare state has developed, in other words degenerated into the mass society, adult education has lost the ethos of social liberation. The people trust the government to do with any problems facing them in the place of them. They do not like to worry about their problems. They prefer to enjoy a tasteful life detached from the real life. In present-day Japan, there are a lot of kominkans and cultural enterprises that provide learning opportunities to clients, most of whom are in the middle class, though some surveys showed that almost all of Japanese people have an illusion that they belong to the middle class. Recently a high official of the Chinese Communist Government visited one of the kominkans in Tokyo and confessed that he could not understand why Japanese people would like to learn without any impetus of economic rewards. We are afraid the Chinese policy of so-called modernisation might adopt the strategy to motivate the people with the aid of materialistic rewards. Japanese people work very hard in the search for a better material life and spend their time in adult education in order to forget their alienated labour and to escape from robot-like working for a short time. Adult education is no more than a runaway from the real world. It is a kind of opium.

I would like to present some cases I experienced at my class of Citizens' College, which is equivalent to tutorial class in Britain. A middle-aged wife told me her motive for attendance was that her husband, a middle management member of staff of a big company, came back home very late every day and the couple could not have the chance of intimate communication, so she entered our college in order to save herself from the desperate loneliness. Another wife asked me what she should do, facing the problem that her husband was given an order by the company to leave his family for his new post. If I am determined that I should help them solve their

problems, I have to share the serious study of the economic structures of the industrial society in which we live and are suffering with them, the students.

3. Adult Education Reform in Action.

Currently the Japanese government is preparing for the new system of education, so-called the system of "learning society". In the second draft of the planning council there has appeared a proposal for the reformation of adult education system. It claims that adult education should make it adapt to the changing society that clearly demands the development of lifelong education. It suggests that public adult education should serve the people as information centres on learning opportunities and as advice offices for learners. It seems that the council expects public adult education not to run educational activities directly, but to assist other agents' activities by means of intelligence activities. It assumes that public adult education cannot survive without such transformation into the coming "information society". We can agree with the council on the principle that the agents of public adult education should not run their own classes but should support other - particularly non-governmental - activities.

Some progressivists criticise this draft because it intends to cut public funds for adult education and to let public adult education reduce to a tiny intelligence office. As the current government is suffering heavily from financial difficulties, such suspicion is well-founded. However, we should criticise this report as regards the fact that it does not want to change the basic premise of the modern public education, which has been destined to produce the labour force for industry.

4. Alternative Education of Adults

Now we should design a new concept of adult education which is to contribute towards the building of new personalities that are expected to form the post-industrial society where we can be free from various kinds of control, suppression, exploitation and manipulation. For this task we must reorganise our system of adult education. First of all, we should adopt a new way of living in place of the convention which seeks more abundant, more convenient and more luxurious life while disregarding the limit of natural resources and the starvation in the third world. We should change our value system from "to have" to "to be".

The aim of adult education should be focussed upon helping people to awaken themselves through learning of the real world by means of discourse with fellows. The contents of learning should not be the scientific system of the objective truth, but the controversial issues of everyday life. Educational relationships between teacher and students should be changed from the professional-amateur, to the fellow-fellows, from the teacher and the taught to the mutual learners. We should adopt the informal or non-formal education rather than the formal. Taking a step forward, we should say that the grass-roots movements of the people and their networkings are the best form of conscientizational process in which the people offer resistance to the establishment, dialogue convivially with other fellows, and transform the world and themselves.

Regrettably however, in current Japan the peoples' grass-roots movement is slowing down and most of public adult education functions as a kind of state ideological apparatus. The atomic generations provide already one fourth of total electric energy. The trade unions are almost completely involved in the policies of the enterprises. Nevertheless, we can recognise that the ecologists' thoughts and actions are exerting a favourable influence

upon citizens who love unspoiled nature. We can but expect that these ecologists will become a germ of the power which has the mission to transform the world in an impasse.

Kosaku Miyasaka

July 1986